

Letter from Alexander Melville Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, November 10, 1872, with transcript

Home, November 10th, 72. (A. Graham Bell, Esq., 35 West Newton Street, Boston, Mass. U. S.) My dear Al.,

I have not the remotest idea of any plan by which an instrument for transmitting vibrations could be made to assist lip readers in distinguishing between p and b et the genus venue, as these elements are evanescently pronounced in ordinary speech. It would be far easier to institute a visible difference by "holding" the voice letters. In point of fact such a difference is made by perhaps a majority of speakers, or lip reading could not have been so successfully practiced. Let the difference of action be taught in schools as a principle, and this source of difficulty will disappear. I question whether even the hand on the throat would feel the difference except in very slow speaking. Musical sounds have all a measurable tune and may be clearly transmitted, but consonantal actions are for the most part too transitory for measurement, and the sounds too faint for transmission. I cannot but think the construction of such an instrument as you contemplate would be labour lost. I go to Kingston on the 30th, so as to be ready to commence on Monday Dec. 2nd. I shall not be able to leave K. till the 24th, but I hope to get off then, so as to reach home on Christmas day. I hope you will come as early as you can and give yourself a long holiday.

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I go to Mitchell on Tuesday (12th). After that I shall commence my Kingston preparations. No letter yet from Fluker. Last from Dublin seems to indicate that next summer will see the family here. Do you know that the Rev. Mr. Usher is dead? Love from all.

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Your affectionate father, Alex. Melville Bell.